

UNION PASS

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Recording info

Voice: Male, age 50ish white, crisp Midwestern sounding

Background: create image of military service, travel with horses and equipment, wagons,

Greetings, Captain W.F. Raynolds at your service. So you're interested in Union Pass, eh? Well then, settle back and listen up.

In June of 1859, I was in the United States Army, in service as a cartographer, assigned to map the Upper Yellowstone River drainage system for the Federal Government. I left Fort Pierre, South Dakota and followed northwesterly direction through the Black Hills of northeastern Wyoming into southern Montana. No such roads as you have now, often we followed Indian trails, or a game trail on horseback or by foot. We traveled to the mouth of the Big Horn River on the Yellowstone River. Slow traveling back then, but what sights there were. From here I headed south up the Big Horn River back into Wyoming to the Wind River Canyon just south of Thermopolis. I believe folks call it Wind River once it hits the north end of the canyon. From here I followed a well established Indian trail that ran along the river, (it would have been a trail used mostly by Crow and Shoshone tribes as they lived in this area). I and my crew spent the winter headquartered near the Platte River. **Lordy, a** Wyoming winter is something to experience. Temperatures so cold your face and hands could freeze if left exposed, and winds that rage and howl....but cold clear mornings with the sun on the snow and crunch underfoot the only noise in the midst of nature's slumber. Caring for pack-stock and provisions takes extra care and precautions as well. **(winter noises, wind, crunching snow, livestock in snow)**

In the spring of 1860 we picked up the trail again, following the Wind River west through the area that were there is now a town of Dubois, Wyoming. I headed on to the lower Dunoir Valley where the Dunoir River empties into the Wind River, approximately 10 miles west of Dubois. I had a guide, who I suspect you've heard of. He was rather aged when I knew him, Mr. James Bridger, though his friends called him Jim. Mr. Bridger informed me that we were about to enter a unique geographic area. His plan was to head south into the mountains and set up a camp on the headwaters of the Gros Ventre River. He told me that the campsite would be on a tributary of the Snake River (the major tributary of the Columbia River) and within 5 miles of the upper Green River and that the Wind River had its headwaters in this same area. You folks would know this area today as the Three Waters Mountain, and the waters of the three rivers eventually make their way to the oceans. I thought that if I took some water from the Wind River with me so that when we got to the campsite, that I could get water from the Gros Ventre River and from the Green River and brew a pot of tea with these mingled waters. We could then have a "continental tea party" that would be noted in all the history books to follow. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, our tea party never happened.

The snow was still quite deep as we ascended the mountains making the travel very difficult. In many places trails had to be cut through the snow so that the horses and

wagons could get through. When near the summit on the 31st of May, 1860, I hiked to the top of a small peak where I could see the surrounding terrain. It was an impressive sight and I gave place names to several of the geographic features: The pass I called Union Pass, and Union Peak and a small lake – Union Lake. It was my determination that this location had to be central to the lands between the Pacific Ocean and the Mississippi River. Until that day there was no known name for these features by the white man. Someday there should be held an official tea party to commemorate this event. Perhaps you can join me.

This audio essay is brought to you by the Scenic Byways of Wyoming program in coordination with the Wyoming Centennial Byway Steering committee, the US Forest Service and Derryberry Recording Incorporated.

Submitted by Stephen V. Banks, Dubois, Wyoming.